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REPORTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

Letter dated 18 July 1997 from the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America on the Economic and Social Council addressed to the President of the Council

During the fifty-third session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the observer from the Palestinian Liberation Organization made the outrageous charge that the Government of Israel had deliberately infected some 300 Palestinian children with the HIV virus. The representative from Israel immediately and convincingly refuted these charges.

My Government has learned that the newspaper that was the source of the Palestinian Liberation Organization observer's "information" has retracted its original article, stating that it saw "its duty ... to emphasize the incorrectness of this serious news item" (al-Ahram, Cairo, 28 January 1997).

The Government of the United States of America is also aware that the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights, His Excellency Ambassador Miroslav Somol, has asked the observer from the Palestinian Liberation Organization to retract his statement.

Despite these efforts by the bureau and the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights, and despite the proven falsehood of the statements made by the observer from the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the latter has so far failed to correct his remarks.

Therefore, the United States Government would like to put on record its abhorrence at, and rejection of, the malicious, patently false and uncorrected statement by the observer from the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Such

patently false statements have no place in deliberations at the United Nations and bring discredit upon the Organization. This is particularly true when one notes that the observer from the Palestinian Liberation Organization placed his allegation in the context of "genocide". Abasing the meaning of genocide in this way is unbefitting a representative to the United Nations. The United States Government strongly believes that the honourable course of action in this situation would be for the observer from the Palestinian Liberation Organization to retract these remarks and apologize.

Failing that reasonable gesture from the observer from the Palestinian Liberation Organization, my delegation respectfully requests that you, as President of the Economic and Social Council, demand that the observer from the Palestinian Liberation Organization retract the remarks and apologize for the harm done to the image of the United Nations.

I further request that you circulate this letter, along with the attached letter from the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights to the Permanent Representative of Israel, and an unofficial translation of the al-Ahram retraction of its earlier article, as an official document of the Council.

(Signed): Seth WINNICK
Deputy United States Representative
on the Economic and Social Council

Annex I

Letter dated 21 March 1997 from the Chairman of the fifty-third session of the Commission on Human Rights to the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations Office at Geneva

Thank you very much for your letter dated 17 March 1997 relating to a statement made at the fifty-third session of the Commission on Human Rights. I fully understand your concern as to the charge made against your country by the Palestinian Observer Ambassador Ramlawi in his statement delivered on 11 March 1997, saying that 300 Palestinian children have been recently injected by Israel with the HIV (AIDS) virus.

As Chairman of the current session of the Commission and representative of a country protecting and promoting democracy, human rights and a fair political dialogue, I share your feeling about such a serious allegation made without evidence, on the basis of a newspaper article. From the context of the situation and information generally available I assume that the speaker should be aware of the fact that these allegations have been proved completely false.

This unfortunate case reminds me of a very similar allegation made towards your country in 1991 in the Commission on Human Rights. Already at that time my predecessor, the Chairman of the forty-seventh session of the Commission, expressed the conviction that declarations provoking racist or discriminatory sentiments must not be tolerated in the Commission.

I fully share this opinion and personally strongly reject such a way of argumentation in the discussions of the Commission. It is my view that a statement of that kind cannot remain without an appropriate reaction.

As requested, your letter has been circulated as an official document of the Commission (E/CN.4/1997/122). I have arranged with the secretariat that also my reply to your letter will be circulated as an official document of the Commission.

Please accept, Mr. Ambassador, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Miroslav Somol
Chairman of the fifty-third session
of the Commission on Human Rights

Annex II

AL-AHRAM - RETRACTION OF AIDS STORY 27 OR 28 JANUARY 1997

(Unofficial translation)

HEADLINE: "AL-AHRAN DENIES THE STORY OF INJECTING AIDS VIRUS TO PALESTINIANS"

"Al-Ahram" published in its edition of 22 January 1997 on its first page a story, according to which the Israeli authorities injected 305 Palestinian children with the AIDS virus. "Al-Ahram" quoted this news item from the N.D.H. news agency which attributed the news item to an Israel newspaper, "Yediot Aharonot". When al-Ahram began to follow up the story at the level of investigation and analysis, it was surprised to find the news item is not true and that the "Yediot Aharonot" newspaper had not published anything of this kind. "Al-Ahram" also contacted the Ambassador of Egypt in Israel who completely denied that a story of this kind had been published in any Israeli newspapers, and therefore "al-Ahram" sees it as its duty, with regard to preserving its credibility regarding the information which it presents to its readers, to emphasize the incorrectness of this serious news item. "Al-Ahram" also informs its readers that it has taken all steps to guarantee the non-recurrence of a mistake of this kind, in order to preserve its reputation as a distinguished journalistic institution.